

Benjamin Franklin

1706–1790 Diplomat: participant in drafting of the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution.

It's possible that Benjamin Franklin never did his country a greater service than just being himself over in Europe. Good-humored and shrewd, with an amazing range of talents, he made even the King of France feel a certain amount of awe. If America could produce a man like this—why, the new United States must be taken seriously.

To sum up Franklin's career is not easy. Journalist, scientist, inventor, he also gave his best efforts to an almost unbelievable variety of public service. As a young man, he founded Philadelphia's first fire company. In his old age, he helped to negotiate the peace treaty that ended the Revolutionary War.

In between, Franklin never stopped amusing and inspiring his fellow citizens. Many of his sayings are

still repeated; for instance:

Early to bed and early to rise,
Makes a man healthy, wealthy,
and wise.

Still, it was Ben Franklin's personal example that probably did the most to make him famous. Well before thirteen separate colonies became the United States, he had already proved there was no limit to what a poor boy could accomplish in the New World. In effect, his own life was the first American success story.

Born in Boston, on January 17, 1706, he was the youngest son of Josiah Franklin, a candlemaker. About twenty-five years earlier, Josiah had left England hoping for a better life across the ocean. As far as anybody could remember, his

were rather wordy; they had a humorous tone and people liked reading them. Ben was delighted, except for a big problem. He found it increasingly difficult to get along with his brother James, who had quite a hot temper. One day when Ben was seventeen, he made up his mind to run away and find work in another city.

Much later, when the mature Franklin got around to writing his *Autobiography*, he cheerfully described how he arrived, nearly penniless, in Philadelphia. It was 1723, and the Quaker settlement had only about 10,000 residents. In fewer than ten years the runaway youth became a leading citizen.

Before settling down there, however, Franklin sailed to England and spent eighteen happy months as a printer in the great city of London. On returning to Philadelphia, he married his landlady's daughter, a good-hearted girl named Deborah Read. With his gift for making friends, he soon found a well-off backer who lent him money to set up his own printing house.

Then Franklin not only began putting out his own newspaper, the *Pennsylvania Gazette*. In the autumn of 1732, he published the first issue of *Poor Richard's Almanack*—and *Poor Richard* made his creator rich.

Throughout the colonies, most families had hardly any reading material in

their homes. Even before Franklin launched his publication, some printers had thought of selling a yearly calendar, with facts about the moon and tides, along with guesses about what the weather might be. But Franklin added a new ingredient.

Cannily, he made up the character he called Poor Richard to give his *Almanack* a special flavor. This imaginary fellow had a mind filled with all sorts of sayings that fit neatly into little gaps on the *Almanack's* pages. "It is hard for an empty sack to stand upright," Poor Richard said. Or, in a lighter mood, "Fish and visitors smell in three days."

Published once a year for twenty-five years, Franklin's almanac earned him a comfortable fortune. Of course, it was widely understood that Poor Richard was none other than Ben Franklin himself. But even while he was so busily involved with his printing and writing, he still found time for other activities that brought him fame in other directions.

Since Franklin was tremendously curious about everything, he taught himself French, Italian, and Spanish in order to study books in these languages. Then he began concentrating on scientific subjects. In 1742, at the age of thirty-six, he worked out detailed plans for an improved heating stove that could warm a room with only one-fourth of

made a member of Britain's Royal Academy, a group of outstanding scientists. Later he received diplomas from several universities, honoring him as a doctor of science. That was why he was often referred to from then on as Dr. Franklin.

A few years before Franklin's kite-flying attracted such attention, he had retired from his printing business, intending to spend the rest of his life on scientific studies. Soon, though, the call to public service made him put everything else aside.

Even during his busiest years as a journalist, Franklin had always been starting a library or a hospital. He had personally designed better streetlights and worked on improving the delivery of mail between his own colony and its neighbors.

In 1754 the French and Indian War made defense of the colonies an urgent issue. Franklin was appointed one of Pennsylvania's representatives to a meeting in Albany, New York, attended by delegates from New England to Georgia. This marked Benjamin Franklin's debut on a wider stage.

At Albany, he proposed a plan for a loose sort of union of all thirteen colonies so they could deal more effectively with common problems like fighting hostile Indians. "Join or Die" was the message on a cartoon he drew to sup-

port his idea. But the British saw danger to their own rule if such a scheme were adopted, and nothing came of it.

From then on, though, one issue after another brought the colonies further along the path to independence. During the next thirty years, Franklin played a major role in many of the great events that led to the birth of the United States.

While he was in London as the "agent" of Pennsylvania's colonial legislature, American protests against the Stamp Act began alarming the British government. Thus it happened that for two days in February of 1766 Franklin stood up in the British Parliament and answered 174 questions about why the Stamp Act was so hated. His skillful defense of American rights made a strong impression on both sides of the ocean.

Home again in 1775, Franklin was elected to the Continental Congress. The following year, he served on the committee that drafted the Declaration of Independence. At the ceremony signing the Declaration, he came out with one of his most notable quips: "We must all hang together, or assuredly we shall all hang separately."

Although Franklin was seventy years old in 1776, he served the next seven years as America's minister to France. He was so popular there that some his-

torians say he deserves much of the credit for the French decision to help the American cause.

After remaining abroad to help John Adams and John Jay negotiate the peace treaty that officially ended the Revolution in 1783, Franklin was welcomed home with pealing church bells. Loved by his fellow citizens even more than he was admired, Franklin was not permitted to retire. For three years, he was president of Pennsylvania's governing council. As a grand old man of eighty-one, he calmed many tempers at the convention that wrote the

American Constitution in 1787

A few months after his eighty-fourth birthday, on April 17, 1790, Franklin died.

He was survived by several grandchildren, his married daughter, and a son who had caused him much sorrow. William Franklin, having risen to be the last royal governor of New Jersey, then turned Tory and spent the Revolution behind bars as a traitor. Franklin forgave him but did not attempt to dissuade him from settling permanently in England after his release from prison.

Name: _____

Benjamin Franklin

1. What was the name of Benjamin Franklin's father?
2. What was the name of Benjamin Franklin's mother?
3. How many brothers & sisters did Ben have?
4. What did Ben's father want him to be?
5. At the age of 12, Ben went to work for his brother as a _____.
6. Why did Ben enjoy being a printer?
7. Ben wanted to write articles in his brother's news paper but feared his articles would be ignored due to his _____.
8. He decided to submit his articles under the allies of an old widow named _____.
9. What was the name of Ben Franklin's wife?
10. What publication made Ben Franklin rich?
11. What 3 languages did Benjamin Franklin teach himself?
12. How did Ben prove lightening was actually electricity?
13. In 1783 Ben Franklin helped negotiate the peace treaty that ended what war?

